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GHOSTS, DREAMS AND HYPNOTISM.

INTEREST in what is commonly called spiritualism or the supernatural is perennial. Now and then it rises to unusual prominence, as in the recent case of the Debar woman ; but at all times there is a dormant interest which assures a numerous audience, outside of the regular spiritualistic ranks, for any well-told story of new or startling phenomena. This is easily accounted for by the superstitions which are common to the human race. Very few intelligent people will admit that they believe in ghosts, but it is safe to say that not one man in ten thousand can walk alone at night through a lonely graveyard, without experiencing an uncanny sensation that is something akin to fear. The nerves are keenly alive to every mysterious light or shadow, sound or motion, and he must indeed be a bold man who, under such conditions, can encounter unmoved anything that looks like the traditional ghost. It is this inborn superstitiousness that lends a charm to the séance and places a potent weapon in the hands of impostors.

But setting aside all charlatanry, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence from people who are presumably truthful to the effect that they have actually seen persons and things "materialize," as the phrase goes, out of nothing. The fact that many persons cannot see such phenomena when others do see them proves nothing. The world is full of sights and sounds that are invisible to some, but visible to others.

Accepting it as a fact, then, that some persons under certain conditions think that they see certain things, how is it to be accounted for ?

To most of us the phenomena of dreams are more or less familiar. They vary greatly in vividness, but almost every one at times has very real experiences during sleep. There is an artist well known to the writer whose dreams are so intensely lifelike that he

is often unable to determine whether some past series of events is real or unreal. In his dreams he is very much given to jumping off from any lofty height on which he finds himself ; but he often asks whether he is asleep or awake, before taking the leap, and has certain tests which he applies to convince himself that he may venture. Conversely, when he is awake, and having a particularly agreeable time, he is often in doubt whether it is real or unreal.

In his case, the margin between physical and mental vision is very narrow. With most of us it is considerably wider; but who shall draw a sharp dividing line ? Given certain, at present, undefined conditions, why may not the physical power of sight become obscured, while the mental eye becomes keenly active ? And if this be true of an individual, why not of an entire company ? There are, it is true, many persons to whom such delusions may seem impossible in a normal or healthy state, but an attack of malaria, with its frequently attendant delirium, may call up before them realistic simulacra of the departed, or cause them to see sights as baseless as the fabric of dreams. Artificial delusions, too, may be produced by drugs well-known to chemists.

Opium, Indian hemp and alcohol are capable of stimulating and distorting the mental vision, when taken in excess, proving that the quality of seeing the invisible is merely latent, and requires only the proper stimulant for its temporary development.

Again there are the phenomena so ably discussed in a recent number of the REVIEW. It is a recognized fact that the senses of hypnotics fall completely under the control of the hypnotizer. They see, hear, feel, smell and taste according to his will. In their brains a mysterious something exists in an abnormal degree, but by all reasonable analogy it must be present in a lesser degree in every other human brain. Favorable conditions may make any one hypnotic to some extent, in a degree sufficient, perhaps, to dull the physical vision and excite the mental vision. Naturally enough a company of sympathetics may be similarly influenced, and it follows that if a few non-sensitives are present their influence may make itself felt, and the hypnotizer, medium or experimenter may fail utterly where he has been accustomed to succeed.

The Orientals are highly successful in this class of experiment. Every Eastern traveler tells of having witnessed feats which can only be explained on one assumption—he believes that

he saw them ; and if we believe that we have seen a thing we are justified in *saying* that we have seen it.

The phrase "second sight," carries a meaning which implies prophetic power, but really there appears to be a second sight common to a large proportion of the human race, and which has been referred to as mental vision. The recognition of its existence greatly simplifies a vast number of inexplicable matters. To it may be fairly ascribed many of the contradictions of eye-witnesses in courts of law ; within its range float the ghosts and apparitions of all ages, and it remains for science to take cognizance of it and make it subserve the common good.

Possibly this quality of vision—and the same is true of all the other senses and perceptions—may have something to do with the new schools of mind cure, faith cure, and the like. Authentic as are the records of failures in this line of practice, it is equally certain that singular cases of recovery or cure have occurred under their auspices, and therein lies a lesson which skeptics are slow to learn. All physicians are agreed that if a patient believes himself to be convalescent the battle is half won. Here is the true stronghold of the mind and faith "doctors," the mesmerizers, and all the rest, some of whom are sincere and earnest persons, and others arrant frauds. Custom and tradition have established it as the professional duty of all orthodox practitioners to frown upon such practices, but they all prescribe "bread pills" upon occasion, and that is neither more nor less than an appeal to the imagination, with a view to influencing the patient's belief regarding his own condition.

The physician would be phenomenally successful who, by a mere act of volition, could induce a sort of waking on the part of the patient in which symptoms should take a favorable turn. In other words, if the patient can be hypnotized into a conviction that pain is pleasure, that disease is health, that wounds have healed, the conditions will at once become far more favorable for recovery than would be possible under normal circumstances of mental or physical suffering. And if the hypnotic state can be maintained during a somewhat protracted period—as seems not altogether improbable—the recuperative powers of nature will have a fair chance to repair damages.

Dr. Hammond has instanced a gunshot wound as a crucial test for the mind-cure practitioners, and at first blush it would

seem absurd that a man with a shattered limb should be told to believe it whole. In point of fact, however, the writer hereof has seen a red-hot iron applied to the flesh of a hypnotic subject without producing the slightest evidence of sensation. When, however, the trance was broken, nerves resumed their functions and the man acted as any one does who has recently burned his hand. Possibly if the hot iron had been applied before the trance the difficulty of obliterating the sense of feeling would have been increased, but it is not altogether incredible that even under such conditions the mind may be diverted and local insensibility induced.

Here then is an array of facts which no one who has given the matter attention will venture to deny. The senses act in obedience to the imagination under certain partly understood conditions. They compel individuals to see, hear and feel in a manner wholly at variance with fact. As a result, well authenticated ghost stories are as old as history ; manifestations and materializations are of equally respectable antiquity, and cures by "bread-pill," or "mind" or "faith," are of alleged frequent occurrence. While our brains are capable of dreaming dreams when asleep, it behooves us to be careful about denying that we can dream with our eyes open. If, as M. de la Tourette assures us, with the approval of Professor Charcot, that hypnotics may walk about seemingly in a sane condition and commit crimes without responsibility, it behooves us to be just a little prudent about asserting that every one must see the same things that we see, and in just the same way.

If the foregoing deductions are correct, disbelievers in spiritualism have been, and are, gravely at fault when they assert that all so-called "manifestations" are frauds. Delusions they may be, but not always in the sense usually understood. It would be wiser for them and scientists in general if they would proceed on the assumption that a very considerable proportion of the alleged phenomena are due to a species of hypnotism on the part of the observer. When the characteristics of this not uncommon mental freak are better understood, possibly some good may result for the world at large ; but in the meantime there is no possible use in telling people that they have not seen what they honestly believe they have seen.

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